

Statement issued by the Association of History Teachers in Hungary concerning the new National Core Curriculum published on 31 January 2020.

1. Lack of publicity

It is to be expected that documents of such significance should be written with the involvement of the wider professional community and the name of its creators should be public. It is unacceptable that the document has been created with the exclusion of the public and even the names of its authors are not to be known.

2. Lack of a professional discussion

It is to be expected that documents of such significance should be written with the involvement of the wider professional community. While the proposed earlier version of the National Core Curriculum that can be considered the predecessor of the current version was written with the substantial involvement of professionals in August-September 2018, this new version has seen no such communication with the professional community. It is unacceptable to exclude the professional community from the creation of this document, which is thus made illegitimate both professionally and morally.

3. Tell-tale priorities

We can't identify with the following goals formulated in the document:

'The goal of teaching history is for students to...

1. gain basic knowledge about the past of the Hungarian national community, the Hungarian nation and Hungary, the European civilisation and humankind;

2. relying on this knowledge have a powerful and well-defined Hungarian identity and thus consider the Hungarian national community both a human community that has emerged throughout history and a natural point of reference;

3. acquire the most important components of the common cultural code (symbols, historic characters, stories, concepts and works)...

We find it professionally highly questionable and one-sided that the documents formulates these as the three most important goals of the teaching of history. This is a great leap backwards compared to all the earlier national core curricula in this country.

4. The priority of data over understanding

We can't identify with the following goals formulated in the document:

'The teaching of history is based primarily on gaining information through narratives: students' knowledge about history is developed through the building up of different layers of stories, descriptions, schemes and interpretations and their interplay. While in primary school the main focus is on storytelling, in secondary school the focus shifts to the interpretation of sources, which helps the development of problem-solving and analytical thinking and the emergence of a historic point of view.'

We think this data- and narrative-centred approach goes against the source-centred, competence-based and activity-centred tendencies of the past ten years, which also had a strong preference for the use of IT. This clearly marks a step back, to an outdated methodological universe.

Even though the document mentions the interpretation of historic sources among its priorities, the development of a critical attitude toward historic sources is not among its stated goals. It only makes it onto the long list of 'learning outcomes', in the form of 'students are able to carry out a critical analysis of sources'. However, beyond developing students' learning skills, this also requires the development of basic comprehension, orientation, critical and communication competences. Marginalising these is a big leap backwards, even in comparison with the framework curriculum of 2012.

5. Obligatory ideological content and norm compliance

We can't identify with the following goals formulated in the document

'It is among the most important goals /of the teaching of history/ to lay the foundations of norm compliant behaviour and social responsibility, as well as learning about the equilibrium of freedom vs. responsibility and fundamental rights vs. and obligations'.

We find this unacceptable in the context of the national core curriculum, because here norm compliance means complying with a prescribed, obligatory ideology. This can't be the goal of the teaching and learning of history. In this respect we find it harmful that the document names 'fact-based, reality-based and *positive* national

consciousness' as an objective of teaching history, not allowing for cases where being fact- and reality-based means a critical evaluation.

6. Authenticity vs. a fabricated, distorted, unauthentic image of history

We can't identify with the following goals formulated in the document:

Among the topics covered in primary school we only find the title 'Victorious fights and battles during the rule of the Árpád dynasty', which makes it potentially possible to cover the Hungarian history of this period without ever mentioning the Mongol invasion ravaging the country in the 13th century. Is this how the abovementioned development of a positive national consciousness is taken care of? Similarly, among the topics set for secondary schools, the highly controversial era marked by Governor Horthy is referred to as 'the country getting back to its feet after the Versailles-Trianon peace treaty', suggesting an all-positive interpretation of this period. Among the key concepts given for each period, the word 'deportation' only comes up in the context of the hard dictatorship of the 1950s, as 'peace time deportations', disregarding the deportation of tens of thousands of Jewish citizens during the war, while in the secondary school section the term only features as in 'deportation to the GULAG' in the Soviet Union.

The uprising and revolution of 1956 is referred to as 'the revolution of the Hungarian nation' – does it mean that the document uses the term 'nation' to include the Hungarian population of neighbouring countries (as it does elsewhere) which, however, had no role in the events whatsoever?

The term 'the dictatorship of János Kádár' suggests an undifferentiated image of this period, disregarding other approaches and descriptions, such as 'soft dictatorship' or 'Goulash-communism'.

7. Teaching Citizenship

We support/agree with the following features of the new curriculum:

We welcome the removal of the topics previously lumped into the 12th grade history course by the 2012 core curriculum (finances and the legal background to participating in the labour market), which are not related to history or historiography. We welcome the idea of introducing a separate subject, 'Citizenship', on 12th grade to include these, in 1 lesson/week. We support the goals set by this subject, i.e. raising students' awareness of their rights and obligations as citizens, moreover, "practice the protocols and skills needed for becoming an active citizen and being successful in everyday life". We find it commendable that apart from finances and labour market skills, this subject will also incorporate environmental awareness and the basics of consumer protection.

We can't identify with the following goals formulated in the document:

Under the heading of citizenship, however, what we predominantly find is "instilling patriotism and learning basic military defence skills". Among the items listed as general and specific goals, we find 'students should be able to name the specific characteristics of Hungarian national consciousness, understand the significance of national identity on individual and community level, learn about the cultural and ethnographic treasures of their locality, should have a local patriotism based on experience, should have the emotional components of belonging to their national community built into their personalities, should have their patriotism intensified, should understand the significance of defending their country, learn about what kind of tasks national defence involves and what kind of obligations it exerts on each Hungarian citizen.'

We find it unjustified and unacceptable that national defence features in the curriculum with greater scope and emphasis than it had ever done since the regime change of 1989, that it is treated as a priority and gets mentioned and stressed in sections concerning several subjects. For example, the curriculum lists under 'learning outcomes' 'students learn one's tasks and obligations towards one's motherland'.

We are at a loss trying to interpret/we find ambivalent the following parts of the document:

The specific content of the subject 'Citizenship' (while we acknowledge that spelling out such specifics is the task of the framework curricula). Whether or not there will be enough properly trained teachers to teach this subject. On this, we hereby repeat our earlier claim that these do not fall into the scope of competence of history teachers, considering that apart from national defence skills, the subject's description calls for 'learning outcomes concerning the family... discussing the topics and interpreting the various considerations concerning

the choice of a partner, responsible family planning, with special regard for the great demographic significance of having children'.

Why is it that the topics for 'Citizenship', otherwise scheduled for the 8th and 12th years are listed among the overarching topics for the 5-8th and 9-12th grades?

8. Less material to cover

We support/agree with the following components of the new curriculum:

One of the things that had been promised concerning the upcoming curriculum was that there would be less material to cover in history, without allocating fewer lessons for it. The document makes general references to this and we agree with the approach. We also support the idea that "on the basis of the local curriculum teachers should single out two of the topics from the framework curriculum per year for in-depth processing, involving the potential allocation of more time than otherwise allocated per topic - specifically, a total of 6-10 lessons."

We are at a loss trying to interpret/we find ambivalent the following parts of the document:

We can't yet see the specific content under the topics listed in the new core curriculum, so we have trouble interpreting the statement that only 80% of lessons will have to be spent on the prescribed material and whether there will indeed be enough time for competence-based teaching and in-depth analysis. Judging by the core curriculum, the proportion of Hungarian history as opposed to world history will increase. How much exactly remains to be seen in the framework curriculum for history, just like the exact proportions allocated to political history and everyday life in the past.

There seems to be too little time allocated for the history of the peoples of the Carpathian Basin and the historic role of the civilisations of the Far East, such as the current decisive role of China.

9. Why get stuck in chronology?

We can't identify with the following goals formulated in the document:

"Due to the special characteristics of history as a subject, it is typically chronologically organised, but this is not exclusive and can be diverged from in certain sections." The proposed version of the national core curriculum discussed in 2018 contained the highly commendable novelty of breaking away from the exclusively chronologically organised teaching of history in primary school. The newly published version only allows for this in Years 5 and 6 and in a very restricted scope: "in Years 5 and 6 the majority of the topics to be covered are historic portraits and the history of everyday life discussed in such a way, which is embedded in the discussion of the given historic period."

Looking at the set of topics in the curriculum, basically progressing from ancient times to today, we see no guarantee for a potentially competence-based and in-depth approach.

10. Statements that are too hazily formulated for proper interpretation

In the earlier, version of the curriculum submitted for professional discussion, history of religion was supposed to be a significant highlight, but it's contradictory that the Jewish religion is not mentioned as such in the new version. In the primary school section it features under Christianity, as 'Christianity: the people of the Old Testament, the life and teachings of Jesus and Christianity'.

In the Ottoman period, how are we to understand that the only specified topic is "the heroes of Turkish-Hungarian wars"?

What kind of content and methodology are we supposed to imagine to go with the last of the primary school topics: "the questions of the survival of the Hungarian nation"?

Summary

We find the current content and goals formulated in the national core curriculum unacceptable.

It contradicts the idea of motivating students to autonomously explore topics consistently with the challenges of the digital age and the basic skill-building mission of the teaching of history. Also, the curriculum prescribes a homogenous ideological norm-compliant behaviour for students; its perceived role as "defending the nation" is strongly biased. At points it presents a distorted image of specific events and processes, moreover, a

distorted image of history itself. Among the teaching goals of "Citizenship" there is a disproportionate emphasis on national defence.

the Managing Committee of the Association of History Teachers in Hungary

Budapest, 2 February, 2020.